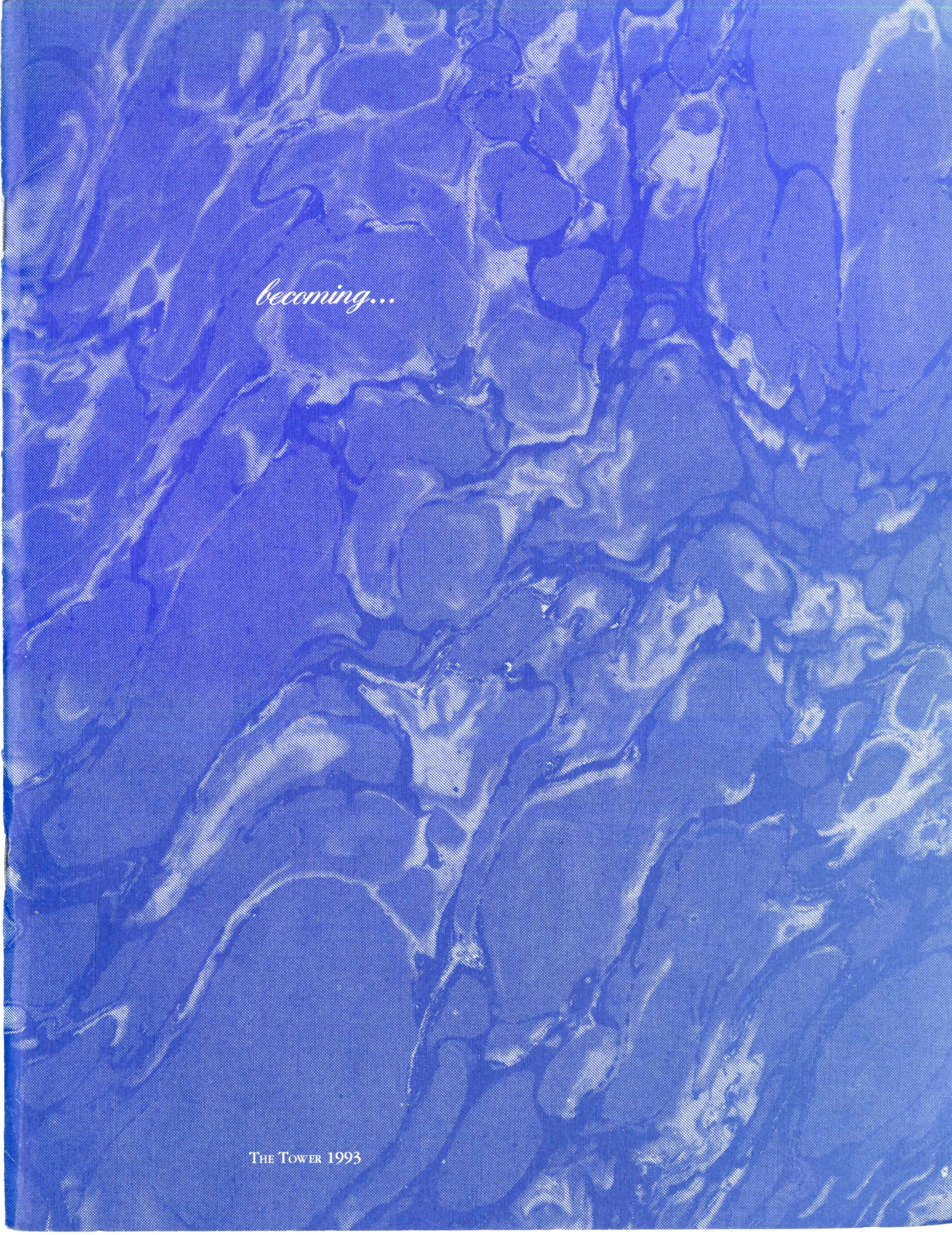
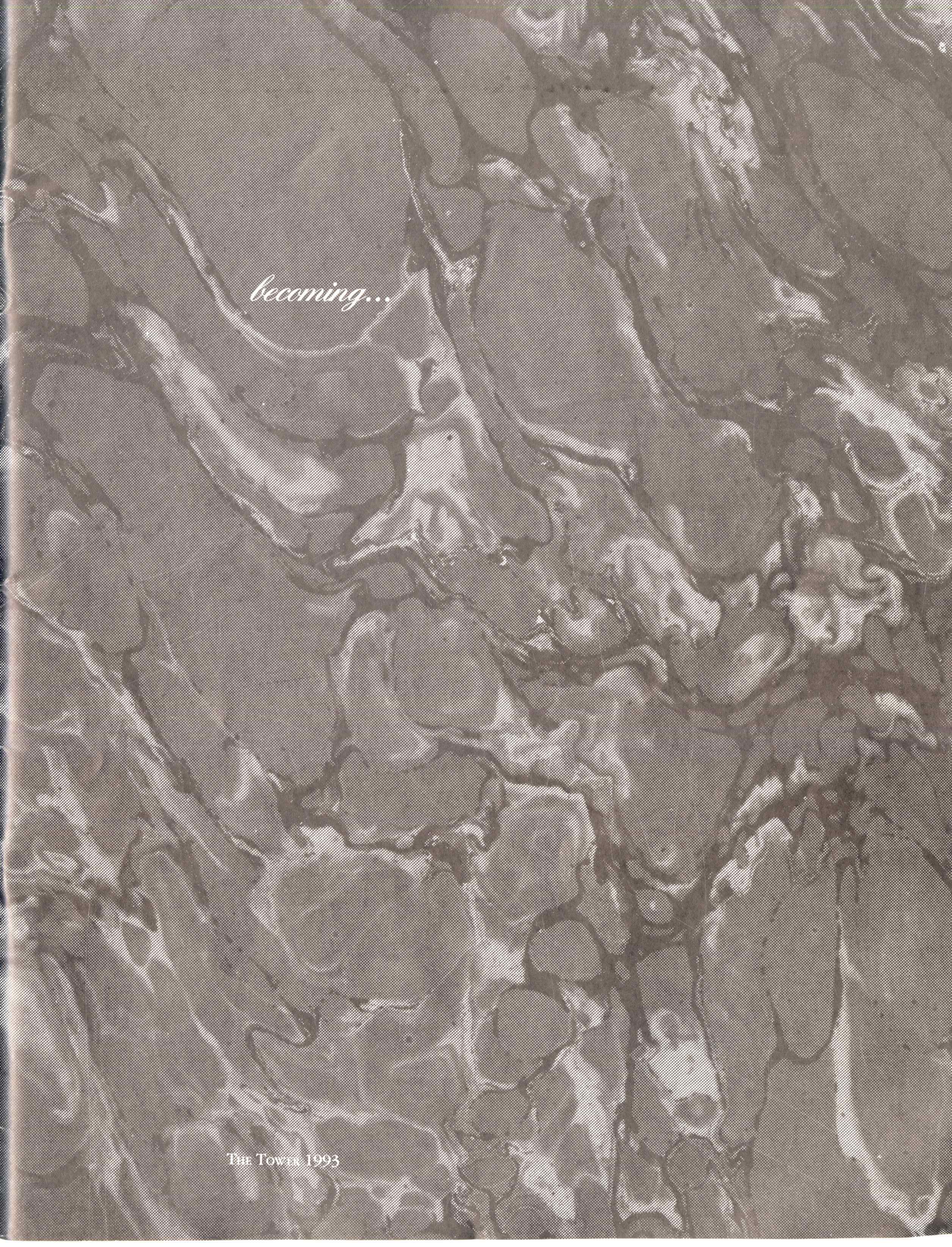


THE TOWER 1993



The Tower 1993

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I have arrived,
the new Indian.
My genetic soup
sufficiently stewed.
But I have my authenticity too–
a state-sanctioned right to be ...
Cherokee,
a card-carrying Indian.
And just to prove that statistics lie,
the state gave me a job and a holiday:
Columbus Day off.

BY MARTIE WILSON

You

You stand alone
awaiting the anger
and the peaceful stability
found only in a whore's arms.

She
waits for someone
who will never come–
love.

BY LYLE ALLEN

Consequence

I would like to mold a world of glass
With little glass trees and little glass men.
And my little glass men would not love and would not hate:
Little glass men cannot feel.
And my little glass men could not see;
They would not have little glass eyes.
And my little glass men could not be seen;
There would always be something more beautiful
on the other side.
And my little glass men would not scream
When the shards of broken glass
Pierced their glass hearts.

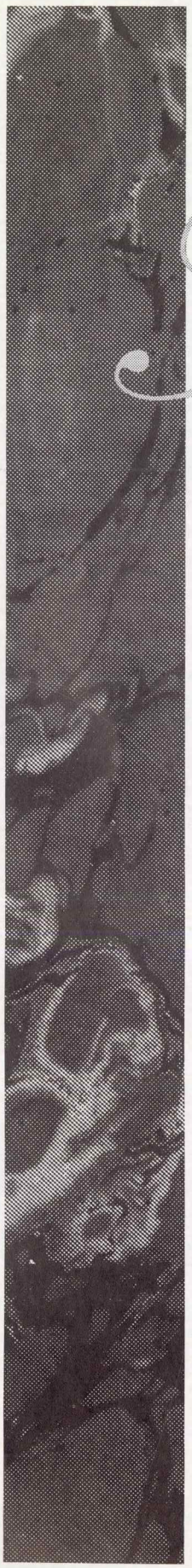
BY D.C. GRIFFIN

sex

when the moment came,
they clung to each other for dear life.

afterwards, he lay tender and glowing
in his lover's arms, as vulnerable as Isaac,
and as trusting;
he said nothing for fear
of breaking the spell, but waited,
while his soul (naked, shameless)
slowly pulled on its clothes.

BY M. MCELROY



Letter to a Professor, English 233

This started out to be my final paper for English. Then despair set in: This is now my suicide note.

I have been reading the assigned topics, and occasionally questions will occur to me that just won't leave my head. They would be great topics for a paper were I able to form some semblance of coherent answers for them. However, it seems the questions that obsess me are the same questions that have obsessed humans for centuries and men far wiser than I have died ignorant of the answers, even after a lifetime of searching. So, after weeks of moving dead paragraphs around and failing to jar any life from the uninspired statements within them, I must admit that I have no pat answers. I have no wonderful new insights or beliefs on which to base a thesis; I have no arguments that I can support. I can only tear down my own steps with doubts, too often while my feet are on them. I would be writing empty, strained rhetoric were I to write on these conclusions in which I do not firmly believe.

I go to my friends for help, for numbered among them are good critical thinkers, good listeners, and good English tutors. They suggest other topics for me to write on. I raise all sorts of protests as to why I cannot write on this or that. The real crux of the matter is that I will not be able to live with myself if I turn in an uninspired paper full of dull ideas and commonplace conclusions. I keep challenging myself to higher heights, to better thinking, to deeper meaning. Usually I can hit some spark of insight, some new angle from which to interpret a question, some inspiration. This time I must claim my muse in mourning, for her slave is dying slowly. I have failed.

The problem is within me. I tenaciously refuse to let go of the topic I have chosen, though it spits and snarls and taunts and refuses to be thought out, introduced, and concluded. I will not let it go. As I'm sure I said before, I do not claim Christianity in the usual, modern, unfortunate sense of the word. Yet most of my obsessions are with symbolism, and more often than not, that symbolism is Christian. So, once again, I am struggling with something from many sides and from

BY KARMA DE GRUY

such a depth that I cannot settle on any vague theory over another.

Take the account of the fall of Man in Genesis. What is this story trying to say? Does it simply explain away children's questions about how everything got here? Maybe, but we cannot deny that a religion was founded on this children's story, so perhaps we should consider it more deeply. Its implications are a little harsh for children. Does it offer despair to its readers – "You have sinned form the start, and now you are cut off. You have lost your great inheritance"? Does it offer hope in itself? Not really – we have sinned, we are doomed, because our forefathers ate some fruit. Then perhaps it should be read symbolically – not as a literal account of exactly how man got here and what occurred in his first few days on the planet, but as a symbolic account of what we, as readers, can expect from our lives today. We are still dwelling in a strange and wonderful garden, but it is a darker one than Eden. Or did we by our actions change the very environment in which we dwell? As I believe you said, we are often punished by our sins more than for them. Have we, through our pride, or curiosity, or greed, warped our psyches, our consciences, and our environments, and have these in turn ganged up on us to make us suffering children in the savage garden?

I looked in *Paradise Lost*. It only raised more questions. Why does Satan want to tempt Man? Why does God put temptation in the face of these creations who are only innocent babes in the woods and know nothing? Why create the potential for evil and destruction?

I looked in the Gnostic gospels. This was even worse. It confirmed my opinion that the account of the creation of man is intended symbolically, but it questioned the very nature of everything, cast too many different lights on the matter, and chipped away at the authority of the text of Genesis I was reading. I can only entertain so many doubts at one time, especially in reference to a paper.

I wonder at the premises of the Old Testament. Perhaps I can blame everything on the unavoidable imperfection of humanity. Perhaps I can join the dark chorus in its cries of "What's the point?" Perhaps I can say that the devil made me do it.

Where is the Tree of Life? If I could eat of it I could live forever in harmony with the Creator. Why this curse of reason? Its knowledge. Reason, the sin in itself, or is it our punishment, offering us sleepless nights, irreconcilable intellectual arguments, faithlessness and insecurity? Why is it that nothing makes us more uncomfortable than real thinking? I wonder whether we were cast out of the garden of Eden and away from the tree of life – or did the garden warp in response to our souls while we uprooted the tree of life looking for its meaning, our curiosity a gift of our new powers of Knowledge? Have we analyzed, dissected, and reasoned Grace to death in our lives? Or did our perception merely change? Did we never leave at all? Did we merely discover with our new eyes the evil that lurks around the corner wherever there is goodness? Do we just now have the power to twist goodness into perversion? There can be no light without darkness, no good without evil, no firmament without sea ... our recognition of these was our downfall. Through such knowledge, we lose the innocence with which we are born.

My innocence is gone. I question too much, I refuse to be satisfied with easy answers, rote learning, memorized prayers. I have accepted what I always considered to be my gift of reason, that thing which separates me from animals, and used it like a knife, cutting away at jagged edges of logic and carving out the rot of fallacy from my brain. Now I discover that, perhaps, ignorance is innocent bliss, authority should not be questioned, and reason will only serve to destroy the reasoner. I have questioned my childhood's teachings and come to unforgivable conclusions, or at least asked forbidden questions. I have been tempted by the serpent, lost my hope of comfort, and died.

I am sending a copy of this letter to everyone who told me my mind and creativity would get me out of anything. They will see how bitterly wrong they were.

From the First Circle of Hell, I Hope,
Your Faithful Student

Up Here

and then it seems
a hundred thousand
pounds are lifted off.

i live up here, now.
floating away from you and her
the clouds are my friends.

running away is no way –
even the clouds grow tired
and stop conversing.

Loneliness has no cure
for the days and clouds
are all the same.

BY D.C. GRIFFIN

No Parade

In yo' tracks, you ought to be stopped
Beating on snares, entertaining stares
Marching in endless delight down this
street of Life

This ain't no parade, no thing to cheer
But it's harsh and real and unjust
But it takes you and drains every tid
bit of energy you have

Try outrunnin' it
Never
Try livin' it to its top
Never
There's just existin' in it, aah yes –
Blow dat trumpet for da last time
Play yo' sax for dat last dime
Again, I say, ease yo' mine

Life – it's a-plenty of things
But a parade?

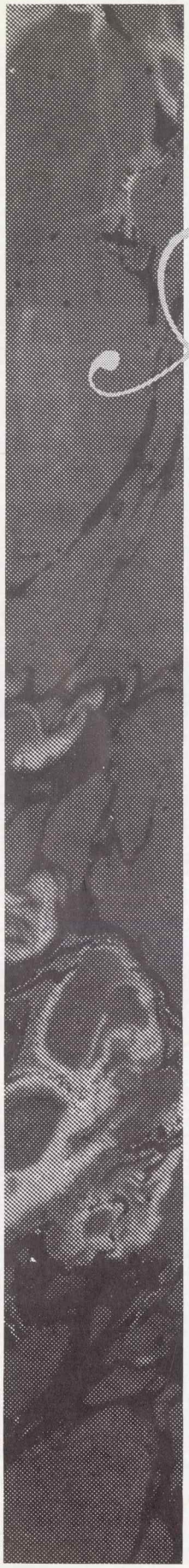
BY KAMBRIA ANDRENICE WHITE

Closet Laureate

Afraid of town,
afraid of perceptions,
qualifications –
a misconception.

Epic works
made in the dark,
not one witness.
no statued park.

BY KEITH JACOBS



Thoughts on the *Odyssey* and the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill Controversy

After long hours pondering this assignment and getting nowhere in trying to draw parallels between the *Odyssey* and the goings-on in the Senate, I sit at the word processor, late at night, renewed, having just gotten a morsel of insight from a friend. Perhaps I can go somewhere with this.

Mass annihilation. Odysseus came home after twenty long years at sea and severely punished the wasteful, inconsiderate, abusive, disrespectful suitors of Penelope. Someone needs to come home in the U.S. government: Politicians have left the government drifting in hypocritical, guileful, and clueless chaos for many more than twenty years, and it is time those who abuse their power were made to pay. Perhaps not with an arrow through the head of every member of the Senate. But it would be a nice change of pace if these "wolves in sheep's clothing" were made to feel used, violated, unconsidered, unimportant. In this particular case (though I could come up with others) I am referring to the attitude of Clarence Thomas and Co. The dolts genuinely seem confused, and even a little hurt, by what this woman has to say about their colleague. They simply don't understand. We're talking deep-down, machismo-fried *ignorance* here, boys and girls: something only a mass cleansing can fix. Like Karen Finley and G.G. Allin together barging into a filibustering session, ripping those blue suits off their water-fat and well-fed, complacent asses, gagging them all, and making them submit to unspeakable tortures. Imagine the possibilities for the world. Imagine what would change! Maybe someone in power would understand what it means to be raped. Maybe someone in power would understand what it means to be harassed, and have your humanity ignored, and your personhood belittled. Maybe some upper-class, white, male corporate asshole could see what life is all about for a good number of people if he had to suck someone's dick and make them some coffee before he got fired or beaten. Maybe if he had his ass pinched he wouldn't smile so much. Maybe if he had to get pregnant and give birth and raise a baby on a "McDonald's salary" he'd be a little more understanding of women and their needs. Maybe if *he* could get raped, he wouldn't think abortion was none of his problem. And maybe if the

BY KARMA DE GRUY

judge told him that rape was *his* fault because he should've known better than to dress so provocatively and he should've known he was too weak to walk alone after dark and he should've known better than to wear that cologne: and why wasn't he at home, barefoot and pregnant and sucking dick and making coffee and eating Valium, anyway?

Maybe we need a great big cleansing ritual for the world, to put everyone on the same level, make everyone understand, and take the power away from the sadists. Or maybe we just need a few arrows.

The Coming of Death

walking about this town
hooded like a phantom
I stopped a moment only to stare at a church
to slowly ascend its steps and lie down upon them
looking upward to the stars

of course there was that longing for unidentified flying objects
or maybe the possibility of a shooting star
but, turning my eyes toward the sight of a darkened stained glass window
(bearing the faceless impression of a Good Shepherd)
I suddenly realized that all had become quite serene...
a complete quiet had descended upon the scene.

for approximately twenty entire seconds
there were absolutely no cars on the roads and streets
and what I heard was an actual wind touching at the hedges ...
the sound of breathing all about
like the place where I was resting was slipping inside the beak
of a hulking dove ...
a hungry dove ... a holy dove

what I heard was the coming of Death
taller than tall, more silent than silence ever was
all hooded like myself, stepping closer and closer towards the earth

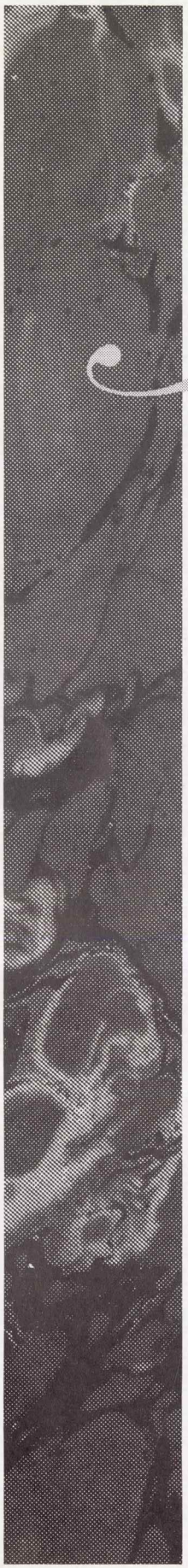
and just as the sound of traffic began to rush back into my ears
I turned my eyes away from the stars
away from the Good Shepherd
and got up only to walk back home and live the rest of my Life.

BY P.C. WILM

Just Some Guy Named "Chris"

He's got a sense of humor as dry as the
Sahara
And Strength too
He's dark as blue, as the night is black
With smarts for the streets,
He's got a thing or two to tell me and you and you
And don't think he's careless or heartless
or filled with rage
Know it!
He's my mother's son ...
Just some guy named "Chris"

BY KAMBRIA ANDRENICE WHITE



Red Eyes

I used to love to lie in the big brass bed in my great-grandmother's house. Whenever we visited her, I laid claim to that old creaking bed. It made me feel like a princess under its dusty canopy. I would lie in it and think about how so many ancestors had slept in it, been born in it, died in it. It was a wonderful, scary, secret feeling, and my great-grandmother understood its charm, taking pains to assure that I and all of her other great-grandchildren would associate her house and everything in it with such a feeling long after she was gone.

Every time we came to see her, Grandma Betsy would be sitting on the porch of the house she'd been born in, sometime in the 1800s, rocking in her green rocking chair. She'd grin and remember all our names, and reach out to hug us. We'd squeeze her thin bird bones and tell her we loved her, and her blue eyes would sparkle mischievously in her line-knit face. She'd adjust the tight bun in her long white hair and cackle gleefully, breathing whiskey-breath in us and patting the flask in her apron.

While we stayed with her our schedules changed to coincide with hers. None of us cousins, her great-grandchildren, wanted to take naps for two hours after lunch, but no one was willing to tangle with the feisty old matriarch, either. So we'd acquiesce and settle down to lunch, a Southern hierarchy of a meal, with everyone being served in order of age from steaming pots in the middle of the table, resting on pot-holders made of bottle caps and knitting yarn that kept the white tablecloth from being burned. Then, full of white rice and green beans and iced tea, we were herded off to the many bedrooms in the old house, and were both thrilled and scared to hear the floors creak and pass the portraits of long-dead relatives glaring down at us from the walls, disapprovingly.

The big brass bed in Aunt Marie's room was "mine" while I was there, and I fought tooth and nail for the privilege of sleeping in it. Aunt Marie had died before I was born, but her pictures were everywhere, and I knew she was watching me every second I was in her room. Usually I got to take a nap with my cousin Margaret, who was my best friend, but one afternoon, Grandma Betsy put me in

BY KARMA DE GRUY

Aunt Marie's room with Anna. I secretly like Anna, but the echelon of cousins was such that she was the one we picked on. Anna had long, thick braids, ripe for pulling, and a plump face that reddened and teared when you pulled her hair. The quintessential precocious brat, Anna made faces at me behind Grandma Betsy's back. I kicked her shins quickly and pulled my face into a smile.

Grandma Betsy turned to us sternly with a crooked finger and looked at us with her sparkling, bloodshot eyes.

"Don't you bicker, now, you two. Say your prayers and get right to sleep."

"Yes ma'am."

"You know what happens to little children who don't take their naps, now."

"Yes ma'am." We shivered in delight and fear. All of us knew about the myriad spirits and sprites that inhabited Grandma Betsy's neighborhood and house: the Seacanamarampus, who lived under the pier just blocks from the house; the Green Boy, who chased children for occult purposes if they went into the neighbor's backyard; the Apple Lady, who led a band of gypsies who kidnapped youths straying too far from the neighborhood, delighting in poking out their eyes with red-hot pokers; and the worst of all, the most terrifying inhabitant of our young imaginations – Red Eyes, who lived underneath the house, a gollum with long filthy hair, ready to gobble us up if we stuck as much as a finger between the latticework to probe the darkness of the enclosed tomb, smelling of moldering leaves, ancient dirt, and the carcasses of the rats that Red Eyes fed on. Grandma Betsy would admonish us, as if she simply *knew* when we'd been peeking under the house, with the words, "You smell like backyard." We'd quiver and think of Red Eyes.

Grandma Betsy smoothed her flour-sack apron and rubbed at the stockings that came just above her knees, gnarled as cypress knots in a swamp. She reached in her pocket where she kept crumpled tissues and change, and our eyes lit up in hopes of a bribe. But it was the rosary beads she pulled out and we knelt submissively and automatically to say our prayers. The floors creaked and the static made

our skirts stick to our knees. As we finished a decade of the rosary, we peeked at Grandma Betsy, who was retrieving her flask from her apron pocket. We pretended to be praying earnestly and looked away.

Prayers finished, we kicked off our shoes and scrambled into bed in stocking feet, pulling the white cover up to our chins. Grandma Betsy gave us one final warning glance and shut the heavy wooden door behind her. Minutes passed silently, dust settled, and we waited for Aunt Marie's ghost to get used to us again.

The room became a cool crypt with nothing alive in it but ourselves and the staticky floors. We huddled half in fear, half in excitement in the shadowy cool room, the trace of sunlight serving only to deepen the shadows in the corners as it crept through the heavy curtains. I was breathless with the simultaneous sensation of being watched and unseen, loving the feel of the cool, heavy sheets and the ancestral memories of the big brass bed.

Anna suddenly jabbed me in the throat with the crucifix on her rosary beads. More upset at her for disrupting my rapturous thoughts of the presence of ghosts than for the bleeding scratch on my neck, I pounded her in the stomach with the side of my balled-up fist. She squealed and came at me with her fingernails. I yanked her braid as I squirmed away, and scooped my shoe from the floor with my other hand. She had her teeth imbedded in my wrist and I started pounding her shoulders and back with a saddle oxford, attempting to break free.

Suddenly we heard the floor creak, even through the squeals and hisses we were trying to muffle – preferring to beat up on each other rather than have an elder beat the fighting urge out of us – and we paused in mid-assault, breathless. The floor creaked again, and quickly we scrambled back under the covers and tried to look asleep.

There was silence.

Across from the big brass bed was an armoire, and in its ancient dusty mirror we could see the door behind us just barely through half-closed eyelids. We watched it, trying to quiet our breathing. I expected Aunt Sue to come in screech-

ing, or perhaps Perin, an ancient rheumy-eyed Cajun man who was somehow related to us – one of them would poke a head through the doorway and hiss at us for disturbing Grandma Betsy's nap, and Perin would likely take a switch to the backs of our legs. We became as still as possible.

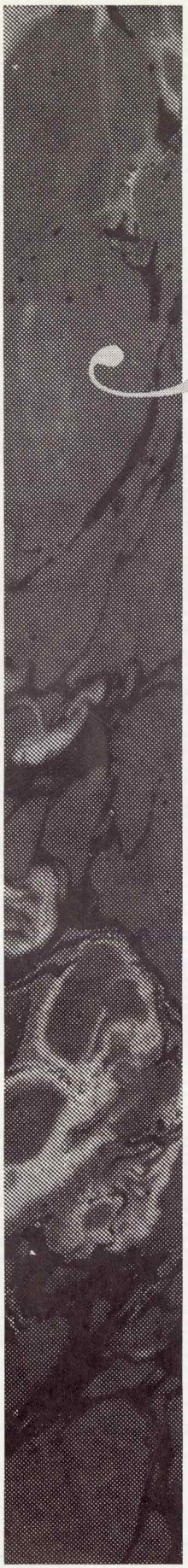
And the door creaked open slowly and slightly. Anna and I held our breaths.

In the reflection of the mirror, we saw a face, lined deeply with shadows and malformed like Quasimodo, framed in black rags laced with cobwebs. It contained less teeth than it should have, and was topped by a stringy head of long, dark hair. I fancied I could see the tail of a rat stuck between its teeth. The face glared at us, as if it knew we were awake and watching, and hovered for a moment, striking fear into our hearts as we encountered its sparkling, bloodshot eyes, half concealed behind the stringy hair. We shut our eyes tightly, willing the apparition away.

Just before the door clicked closed, we heard a harsh whisper:

"Get to bed!"

We did.



Cry in the Dark

I awake in the middle of the night hearing my brother scream, "No, Daddy! Daddy, no!" Am I having another nightmare or is this the real thing?

Sadly, this is the real thing. My brother James, twelve years old, had spent the day on a picnic in the country with a missionary family who lived in the apartment three floors below us. It wasn't late – maybe ten o'clock or so. Why was Daddy beating him? He knew where James had been. What had my brother done to make Daddy so angry?

To this day I still do not know what happened that night. In those days, on nights like that one, I would just lie on my bed and cry in the dark.

My father, 6'2" and 250 pounds, had an uncontrollable temper, especially when my brothers messed up. It was like he expected his sons to be perfect, and if they were not, he was determined to beat perfection into them.

I remember another incident when my father was coaching pee-wee football, when he was showing the boys how to block an oncoming opponent. One of my younger brothers, Roland – we called him Rolo – was unfortunately on Daddy's team. I sat on the bleachers next to the football field and watched while my father used Rolo as a blocking dummy. Running, my father – that 250-pound monster– knocked down my brother. Rolo, tears streaming down his face, never said a word; he just picked himself up, only to be knocked down again and again.

As I watched I had plenty to say to my father, and under my breath I told him just what I thought about the way he was treating my brother. You old bully, how can you be so mean? I did not dare say anything to Daddy's face because when I got home, I knew I would get a beating just like the ones my brothers had been given.

But as I grew older, I became bolder. I began to speak my mind, to tell Daddy just what I thought. When I was about fourteen, Daddy decided I had spoken my mind too many times. I wasn't sassy – I just had a different opinion from my father and he did not appreciate it. Angered, he quickly dragged me to my bedroom and began to beat me. I fought back, one time kicking Daddy in the face. (I still have a

BY SHERYL REGISTER

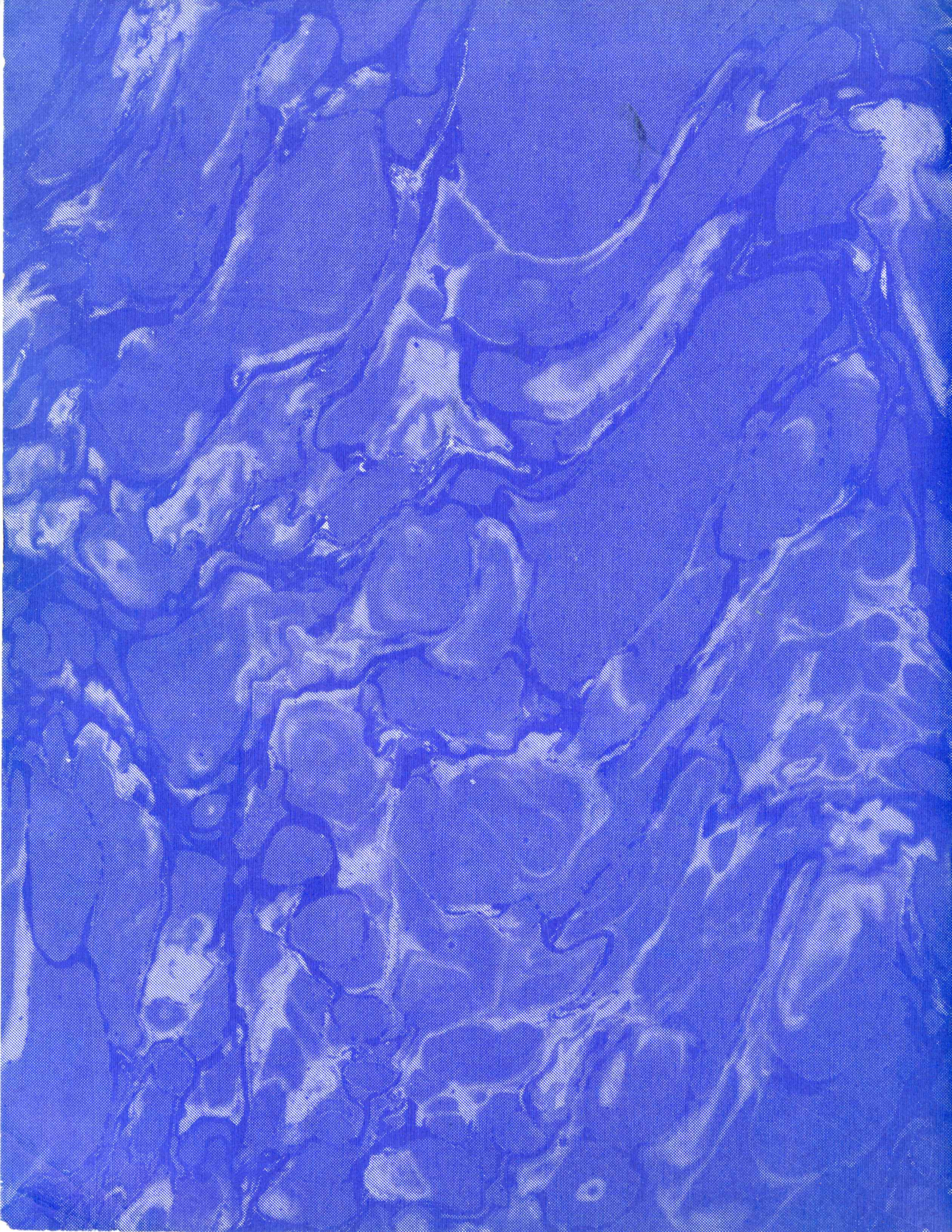
scar on my left side where the paddle missed my rear in the struggle.) Finally Daddy finished or maybe just decided he had better quit, and left me lying on the bed crying and hating him with all my now crushed heart. As he walked out of our room, he said to my brothers and sister sternly, "Now don't you say anything about me punishing Sheryl – she is getting too smart for her own good. If you do, you all will get the same or worse." Scared into secrecy, they obeyed him.

It was then that I vowed that I would not abuse a child – if I should have one. Now I am married and have two children of my own. I know the necessity of discipline and at times punishment. But I know that beating a child is never an appropriate type of discipline or punishment. When my children need punishing – because no child is perfect – administering it is so painful for me that afterwards I have to go outside and take a walk or go to my room so they won't see me cry.

I feel that I am one of the survivors of child abuse – that I have even triumphed over being abused – because I chose not to treat my children the way my brothers and I were treated by my father. I guess in a way my children are also survivors.

As an adult I still have some of the same nightmares; I hear my brother screaming – and wake up crying. I thank God that my husband and I are not abusive, that my children will not ever have to cry out in the dark.

Opp Hop

selected and tried, their children are we?
neglected and fried our dreams will be.
opportunity lied ... and hope? all so bleak.
poor friend and i tranquility seek.
unbroken, we stammer, unbroken, we lie
for each other. we keep to ourselves, affected and tied
to each other. ultimately one lonely carcass ...
selected, infected, neglected and died.

BY K. WINSTED